

# Cedar Keys

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

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### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1929.
- Acres: approximately 760.
- Located in Levy County, FL.
- Location: the refuge is comprised of 12 offshore islands, around the town of Cedar Key, ranging in size from a few acres up to 120 acres. Access is by boat only.
- Administered by Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge.

### Natural History

- Four of the islands, Snake, Deadman's, Seahorse, and North are designated as Wilderness areas.
- The largest colonial bird nesting site in north Florida is located on the refuge.
- White ibis, brown pelican, great blue heron, little blue heron, tri-colored heron, night heron, snowy egret, great egret, and cormorant nest on the refuge, as do bald eagle and osprey.

### Financial Impact

- Important part of eco-tourism in Cedar Key.
- Protects water quality for important shell fishing and aquaculture industry.
- No staff, personnel from Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge have responsibility for Cedar Keys NWR.
- 25,000 visitors annually.

### Refuge Objectives

- Provide nesting habitat for large colonial bird rookery.
- Protect limited island habitats.
- Provide wildlife dependent recreation and environmental education for the public.

- Protect significant cultural features including 1800 lighthouse, civil war era cemeteries, and prehistoric Indian middens.

### Management Tools

- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Biological monitoring.
- Partnerships.
- The University of Florida utilizes the lighthouse and associated facilities as a Marine Science Laboratory for research and education.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Because of its small size and importance to wildlife, Cedar Keys Refuge can support only limited public use.
- Walking trail on Atsena Otie Key.
- Birdwatching.
- Saltwater fishing from beaches.
- In order to protect the nesting birds on Seahorse Key, public entry and use is prohibited from March 1 to June 30. The closed area includes all of Seahorse Key and a 300-foot buffer zone around the island.

### Questions and Answers

*How do I get to Cedar Keys NWR?*  
Cedar Keys NWR consists of 12 islands off shore from the town of Cedar Key, Florida. The refuge is only accessible by boat. In the town of Cedar Key there are private enterprises that rent boats or offer tour boat rides that will take you to the islands.

*Can any boat go to these islands?*  
Yes, you can take your own boat to the islands. However, it is important to pay attention to the weather and tide conditions. All the islands are surrounded by shallow mud flats.

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During low tides the islands are relatively inaccessible. Also, if you beach your boat on the islands during high tide your boat will be out of the water during low tide. This will leave you stranded until the tide returns.

*Are we allowed to walk where ever we want on Cedar Keys NWR?*

Atsena Otie Key has walking trails through the interior of the island. For public safety and to protect the vegetation, the interior of the other islands are closed. These islands have thick undergrowth vegetation along with poisonous rattlesnakes and cottonmouth snakes. Visitors are welcome to explore the beach areas of all the islands, except Seahorse Key, during the bird nesting period.

*When can we visit Seahorse Key?*

Seahorse Key supports one of the largest colonial bird rookeries in north Florida. During the nesting period, March 1 through June 30, the island is closed to all public entry. This includes a 300-foot buffer zone in the Gulf of Mexico, around the island.

*What about visiting the lighthouse on Seahorse Key?*

The lighthouse and other facilities around it are utilized by the University of Florida as a marine laboratory and classroom. In order to protect the university's equipment and the students that stay there, the lighthouse is not open to the public. When the university is not using the lighthouse, other schools (elementary school through college) and organizations are allowed to utilize the marine lab for environmental education. Once or twice a year the refuge holds an open house. During this time, a refuge employee is stationed on the island to permit public visitation to the lighthouse.